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...an's Rule and Christ's Reign.

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A SERMON,

PREACHED ON

THANKSGIVING DAY

NOVEMBER 27TH, 1862,

BY THE

REV. ALEXANDER H. VINTON, D.D.,

Rector of St. Mark's Church, New-York.

NEW-YORK:
JOHN A. GRAY, PRINTER, STEREOTYPER, AND BINDER
FIRE-PROOF BUILDINGS,
CORNER OF FRANKFORT AND JACOB STREETS.

1862.

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Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 27, 1862.

To the Rev. Alexander H. Vinton, D.D.:

Dear Sir: At the close of the services in St. Mark's Church, this day, there was a general expression of wish that the sermon there delivered by you should be printed.

Sympathizing entirely and earnestly in that wish of your congregation, in our own and in their behalf, we beg permission to have it published.

With cordial and affectionate respect,

HAMILTON FISH,	A. V. H. STUYVESANT,
J. B. HERRICK,	S. A. DEAN,
JOHN A. ISELIN,	LEWIS M. RUTHERFORD,
J. FAITOUTE,	MEIGS D. BENJAMIN,
WM. REMSEN,	WM. H. SCOTT,
E. B. WESLEY,	E. S. CHANLER,
CHARLES EASTON,	P. C. SCHUYLER,
H. B. RENWICK,	THOS. M. BEARE,
ALFRED H. EASTON,	THOMAS McMULLIN.

To the Hon. Hamilton Fish, and others:

Gentlemen: I thank you very sincerely for the kind feeling that prompts your request for the publication of my sermon of Thanksgiving Day, and cheerfully submit it to your disposal.

ALEXANDER H. VINTON.

St. Mark's Rectory, Dec. 1st, 1862.

MAN'S RULE AND CHRIST'S REIGN.

EZEKIEL 21 : 26, 27.

"THUS saith the Lord God, Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and it shall be given to him."

ZEDEKIAH was one of a series of kings who had profaned the sacred royalty of Israel, and God was about to terminate not only his reign but his dynasty. The crown and the diadem were both to be taken away from Jerusalem, that is, the kingly and priestly powers were to be superseded by the rule of a foreigner and a pagan. Nebuchadnezzar was to be their future lord, and Babylon their royal city. Not that his reign should be lasting or his power perpetual; for there was an ancient covenant of God, that of the fruit of David's loins should come forth a king who should reign forever.

In this grand revolution of Israel God was only preparing the way for his Messiah, and not

by this revolution alone, but by others that should follow the track and tread on the heels of this. The Babylonian dominion was to be followed by the Persian; the Persian by the Grecian, and that again by the Roman; and then should come the splendor and power of God's royal Christ. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is; and it shall be given to him."

This very lesson was taught to Nebuchadnezzar himself, for in the remarkable vision interpreted by Daniel he saw a great image composed of various metals, of which Babylon was the golden head, representing three great revolutions of empire, and after these one grander still, in which a stone, cut without hands from the mountain, should break in pieces all other dominion, and should stand forever. This was the divine regency of Christ. Thus it is, that temporal events help on divine plans. Thus in the mind of God political and religious ideas lie side by side. The nation and the Church are coördinate forces in effecting the divine covenant, and Jesus Christ is King of nations as he is King of saints. There are certain grand, fixed purposes of God which run straight through the order of the universe, from the beginning

to the end. There is to them no past nor present nor future—that is, no finished facts can add proof to their certainty—no present force or lack of force can stop them from working out into life and action before our very eyes; and no contingency or peradventure can, for an instant, bar their way to final completeness. Not that the Divine purposes drive on to their inexorable results alone, treading down nature and art and man, as if to show how superior God is to the world that he has made, and to the laws he assigned for it. It is just as true that man is in the world as that God is—man as he was made and is not yet unmade; in the image of God, with intelligence and a will—man a doer not less truly than God a doer. A Divinity moving sublimely in the world does not exclude humanity working actively, although he shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we will.

These Divine purposes running in parallel strands through the whole course of things, and fastened at each end, are the warp of the universe into which all its history is to be pictorially woven.

They are wound around the great axis of the world, and wrap up the coming centuries, fold beneath fold, and then as the cylinder revolves the warp is unrolled, and comes out to meet and

supply the days and months and years and ages, and as it comes, man works into that steady warp his ever-shifting woof. He tosses his busy shuttle back and forth between the strands, with bound and rebound, day and night, with many-colored threads and many-patterned forms, until the straight, strong warp-threads are covered up and hidden, and the whole product seems to be made by man alone. He has worked his mind and passions and will into it so compactly, that history is made up of the freaks of his fancy—the whims of his willfulness, the orderly shapes of his intelligence in business, literature or government; and colored throughout with the complexions of his loves and hates; silvery and golden for his better affections, burning crimson for his lusts, and deadly purple for his antipathies and loathings. So that all history seems man-made. Yet it is not so. This is only the filling and the woof. God's purposes are still the foundation and the warp. Let any bold hand attempt to thwart these purposes, to traverse the course of Providence, to tear the fabric of events across the fibre, and the man learns a lesson of profitable modesty. He may seem to force a hole in the texture, but the rent will run with the warp, and it is only man's work that is broken across, not God's.

So much we are taught by universal experience as well as Revelation, while Revelation adds another truth that experience is not yet ripe or universal enough to learn of itself; that is, that God's purposes in the world have ultimate reference to the glory of his mediatorial Son.

We gather glimpses of this grand truth as we study the history of the world, with Revelation for its key. History loses its profaneness as interpreted by the Bible, and we can recall events and their surroundings which were procured by man acting out his own voluntariness so completely, that nothing but his own personal self is projected on the scene, and yet just these events and just these surroundings made the necessary crisis which manifested the Christ. Could the Saviour have been born before the fullness of the time decreed? And what constituted the time's fullness and fitness? Was it not a universal, earthly monarchy and a universal language? And whence came that monarchy but from human ambition or the universal language, but from commerce, curiosity, luxury, taste, all human purely, and of the earth? Man working in the dark to bring God out into light.

So when the Saviour had lived out his human term, the Divine plan that required that he

should die contemplated likewise the method no less than the end. The purpose must have its complement in the means. The Christ must have a Judas and a Pilate, or else the world's salvation were forfeit. Yet were there ever two examples of pure voluntariness and independent action more signal than theirs? Judas plotting, hesitating, chaffering, betraying and repenting; Pilate arguing, excusing, deprecating, yet yielding and condemning, are the very impersonations of free will and voluntary accountability. So do the destroying deeds of devils illustrate the salvation of Christ.

We need not linger on history any longer to establish the principle, as a fast truth of the world, that God overrules the changes of the times, in order to bring out the peculiar glory of his anointed Son—but for our present use, let us look at it in its prospective bearings.

Our text is not yet fulfilled. There still are, and shall be, overturnings, overturnings, overturnings among men, of which the presiding purpose shall be all divine and Christly. They shall, each and all, tend to bring out his kingdom into riper development. I say riper development, for all the influences of that kingdom are not yet fruited. The power of the Gospel is a thing of growth and succession. It

was necessary to graft it on human nature in separate cions, coming into bearing at different periods. The earliest ages of the Church learned mainly the devotional and pious element of the Gospel, while it is only in its later periods that its ethical influence has burst into growth. The first and great commandment was accepted first, and it sprang forth in the luxuriant godliness which makes the early Church seem so freshly holy through all the ages. But Christians were slower in accepting the second cardinal law of Christ's kingdom, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Their godliness is not yet thoroughly mated with charity, and this life-principle of Christian ethics yet seeks a nobler and wider development. When this shall have become universal—when godliness and charity, twin sisters of a divine birth, shall walk hand in hand through the world, welcomed and adorned alike with royal honors from men's willing hearts, then will begin the hallelujah period of the Church; for the kingdoms of the world will have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. Christ's reign will be unhindered in any one of its declared purposes; deliverance to the captive, the opening of the prison-doors to them that are bound, eyesight to the blind, and the

healing of all broken hearts. The grand rule of mutual conduct among men will be, "to do to others as we would they should do to us." The world will need no other redress for its disqualifications and wretchedness. God can claim no worthier tribute for his Son than a world of men changed divinely into an equal and loving brotherhood.

In the changes of the world, then, we are to look for the steady advance of those great principles which grow from the Gospel of Christ, and which Christ's reign was intended to illustrate. And those principles are, as we have seen, the establishing of human rights and the improvement of the human condition, morally, socially, politically; the awarding to each man his prerogatives as a child of the Heavenly Parent; the loosing of every bond but those of rational and moral obligation; the breaking of all subjection but that voluntary allegiance to law, which is the sublimest act of human independence, and the crown of humanity. This is the liberty wherewith Christ makes all men free. And to this the progress of religion and the revolutions of the times infallibly tend. For not only does our practical Christianity take the form of philanthropy more than ever, in its missions, its hospitals, its asylums; its

care for the body, as well as the soul; its remedies for social evils, as well as spiritual; but every *civil* change of our times looks toward the enlargement and elevation of humanity. Even the first French Revolution, which reversed the proverb that "Satan is clothed as an angel of light," and was, instead, a celestial idea, mantled with hellish horrors; which wrote its edicts with daggers, drawn and dripping from human hearts; even this mighty overturn left not itself without extenuation, in the thoughts which it set adrift in the world, that stirred the world's mind to grand and solemn issues.

That sublime idea lived on, when the revolution was past; lived on, when the horrors had subsided into the pit again and the blood-stains were faded out; still lives on, in the Christian sentiment of brotherhood, and will live till Christ comes again, and live forever, proving itself celestial by its immortality.

So in the more recent changes of the times. See it in Italy—poor Italy, as we used to think—the cemetery of national character, where you moved among memorials of dead beauty and grandeur, and trod on relics of glory at every step; where the living humanity seemed tapered down to a point, without any pith or fibre, but only soft succulence; where men's souls

seemed shriveled into absorption by the pressure of despotism, civil and spiritual — Italy, glorious Italy now, has been overturned, overturned, overturned. The graves are opened. The manhood that was buried there is awake again, in the strength and beauty of the resurrection. We have stood amazed at the suddenness and completeness of the change, in which despot after despot fled away, in a terror that was ready to call on the mountains to fall upon them and the hills to cover them; while the people possessed themselves of freedom and empire, as calmly as if the right had never been contested nor the possession broken for a moment. What a splendid demonstration it is of man's capacity for self-government and freedom — for self-government is freedom; and what a long leap of progress our race has taken in the emancipation of Italy! Will any man say that this overturn is not of God, for the speedier manifestation of his Christ? We know, indeed, the human agencies that worked the work. We know how French policy, and Austrian fear, and Papal bigotry, and Neapolitan meanness helped on the result, drawing or driving the enslaved people into revolution and independence. We know that not every cause and motive was divine and

Christly, but, in part, basely human. Yet the result, how worthy of divinity and of Christ! A free people, a free government, a free Gospel, is not this the liberty of Christ, social, civil and religious?

And when the work goes on to completeness; when, as in the case of Jerusalem, God shall take away not only the crown of despotism, but the diadem too; when king and priest shall tyrannize no more; when he who wears both crown and diadem, claiming to be both temporal and spiritual sovereign of the earth, shall be superseded; when the clay and iron feet of Nebuchadnezzar's image, which represents the Papal dominion, shall crumble away, and Rome, no longer "lone mother of dead empires," shall be the royal city of an evangelized Italy, will not all this fresh freedom of soul and body, deliverance to the captive, sight to the blind, demonstrate the acceptable year of the Lord, and prove that Christ is come, whose right it is?

See how the overturn in Russia tends toward the same issue. The serf is a slave no longer, but one with a recognized manhood in him. The agency here was not the same as in Italy. There, freedom was the claim of the people; in Russia it was the gift of the

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despot. In the one, it came from within; in the other, from without. With one it was an inspiration; to the other a revelation. Yet the same divine spirit of beneficence wrought alike in both, aiming at the same triumph of Christ in the world. We have not, indeed, seen the issue of the measure in Russia, and there are signs that bode confusion. Yet we may safely be hopeful of the result; because the experiment runs in the line of God's great purposes of love to the race. There is no idea so plastic and creative in its influence on character as the idea of liberty; none so fertile of improvement, or that lifts a man so surely up to the level of his destiny. And I may add, that no social experiment was ever tried that has proved so harmless as the gift of freedom. I say the *gift* of freedom, because when freedom is quarreled for and battled for, it may sometimes carry its habit of fierceness too long. Born of cruelty and suckled with blood, its first strength may be savage. But let freedom be *conferred* as a Christian boon, in the spirit and temper of Christ, and there will always be found enough of that essential principle of humanity which responds to a felt divinity to insure for the experiment a grateful welcome, and therefore the perfect safety of

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